

## Memory and Attention

*"I forget conversations."  
"I used to remember everything."*

In order to remember something, you first have to focus on it. If you are distracted or thinking of something else, the information or event can't become a memory.

Many people who report memory problems are actually experiencing difficulty focusing their attention.

One way to improve attention, is to limit distractions.

- Work in a clutter-free zone, or you may find that your focus is constantly drawn to other things in your surroundings
- Turn off the TV and only listen to music without words
- Use a fan or air purifier to decrease the number of distractions you hear

### TEAM UP:

*Identify two places you can go  
when you need to focus.*

Place 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Place 2: \_\_\_\_\_

## Promoting Good Cognitive Health

Taking care of yourself is important not just for your general health but for your cognitive health too.

Make sure you:

- Maintain a healthy sleep schedule
- Eat a healthy diet
- Exercise
- Spend some time in activities you enjoy

## Resources

You can find many good resources for concentration, time management, and organization in books and on the internet.

Some websites offer free\*\* time management tools:

- <http://www.todoist.com> lets you make to-do lists that you can share with others
- <http://www.30boxes.com> offers calendars with connectivity to family and friends
- Google and Outlook offer much more than e-mail; they both have several organizing tools and calendars

\*\*At the time of this writing, the tools listed were available free of charge. Improvement and expansion of tools may be associated with additional fees.



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# Cognitive Skills



Part of the  
**Team Up to Facilitate  
Functioning (TUFF)** series by the  
Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center  
Polytrauma Team

## What is Cognition?

Cognition includes skills such as memory, attention, and organization. Cognition is how we process and understand all the information entering our brains. Changes in cognitive skills can be brought on by many different factors.

### TEAM UP:

**Mark the difficulties you are experiencing and discuss how each can affect cognition.**

- ☐ Poor sleep
- ☐ Stress
- ☐ Pain
- ☐ Injuries
- ☐ Substance Use
- ☐ Emotional Distress
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Treatment of these underlying problems can improve cognitive abilities. You will also benefit from increased use of strategies. Most people use strategies to be more efficient in their everyday lives. Use of strategies is not a sign of weakness, but rather shows ingenuity and flexibility.

### TEAM UP:

**Which of these strategies are you already using?**

- ☐ Writing down information
- ☐ Recording information in a planner or your phone
- ☐ Setting things in specific places so you won't forget them

## Organization and Time Management

*"I always misplace my keys!"*  
*"I write things down, but it doesn't help, because I lose the papers I've written on."*

If it seems like you constantly misplace things, have difficulty completing tasks, and miss appointments, you will benefit from additional structure to help you complete daily activities.

### TEAM UP:

**Check two things in the list below that you can start doing today to increase your organization and time management.**

- ☐ Designate a place to keep your keys, wallet, cell phone, and other personal belongings
- ☐ Break down tasks into smaller steps to help you get started and to keep you from feeling overwhelmed
- ☐ Avoid excessive use of sticky notes or you will have a lot of brightly colored papers you ignore
- ☐ Keep all your notes in a single location to avoid losing all those little slips of paper
- ☐ Set an alarm or timer to help you stay on track; when the alarm sounds, make sure you are still doing what you should be
- ☐ Plan to complete activities that require a lot of brain power when you are refreshed and at your best, not late at night when you are tired

## Planners

Committing to using a planner is one of the best things you can do to improve organization and time management.

Planners come in many forms including paper and digital, like a smartphone. Your personal strengths and needs should guide you as you determine which system is best for you.

Regardless of the type of planner you choose, the following suggestions are important:

- Keep your planner with you at all times
- Your planner should include:
  - Your appointments and scheduled activities
  - Practical to-do lists
  - Notes
- Avoid surprises in your schedule by referring to and updating your planner morning and evening
- Don't forget to schedule the steps for completing larger projects; this will allow you to view progress and increase awareness of your accomplishments



Cognitive

Skills

